

Council commentary

by LIZ FORGAN and PHILLIP SO

TOLMIERS 'TWADDLE'



CHRISTOPHER BOOKER and Bennie Gray, the two journalists who have offered to develop Tolmers Square, Euston, and hand the profits back to Camden Council, were ridiculed last week as "amateurs who trade in practical jokes."

"There is no sense, substance or reason in their proposals," Tory councillor Julian Tobin told the council. "They show a return on investment that no prudent developer would go through with."

Julian Tobin:
"No sense, substance or reason in the Booker/Gray proposals."

"We are wasting out time at the expense of the public of Camden and of the people who are waiting for homes," he added.

The Booker/Gray proposals, which are being taken entirely seriously by council officers and the Labour majority group, were put forward to challenge a joint development proposed between Camden and Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust.

The Levy scheme, they said, would give an excessive profit to the company

at the expense of Camden's ratepayers and they have assembled their own finance and expert advisers to back a rival scheme.

Until last week, leading members of the Labour group were optimistic about the new offer. But its success would ultimately depend on a Tory Environment Secretary granting compulsory purchase powers to the council to buy out Stock Conversion's holdings—about half the 11-acre site.

And the news that the Minister had rejected a far less controversial CPO on three blocks of flats at Lissenden Gardens, Gospel Oak, without even a public inquiry, has cast new clouds over Tolmers Square.

"In the face of the Lissenden decision we must not be sanguine about the chances of a Tory Minister approving anything he doesn't fancy and I don't think he fancies the Booker/Gray scheme," said council leader Councillor Frank Dobson.

So far, he said, the council's plans for eight acres of housing at Tolmers Square had not been delayed by the

argument over who should do the development. But a decision could not be deferred much longer.

"Perhaps to be a general one must harden one's heart but I believe our primary objective is housing and the conceivable delays if we abandon the Stock Conversion scheme might stretch out for five years—perhaps a child's formative years," he said.

"We must very seriously consider the possibility that by making one choice we may be condemning a child to five years in a stinking basement when it could be rehoused on this site."

Strong support for Booker and Gray's Claudius Properties scheme was still coming from some Labour councillors. Councillor John Lipetz said he was prepared to accept delay if it meant a better deal and "a squeeze on wealthy developers."

People, he said, were "sick to death of a situation where a small group of wealthy men and institutions are taking the community for a ride. We have to go cap in hand and sell planning permissions to get housing we desperately need."

Councillor Brian Loughran also declared he was sticking to his decision of "unqualified opposition to the Levy deal" and qualified support for Claudius, subject to financial and technical considerations.

But other Labour councillors were not so sure. "I have seen no figures for who is making money out of the Claudius deal," said councillor Joe Jacob.

"No doubt the bankers will get it and their professional advisers

will not be operating would like at some stage who we are giving too much we are giving.

"Whatever deal Tolmers Square we have office block which is the ultimate folly is not coupled with the

For former Plan chairman Councillor Claudius Properties and surveyors added a developer just as much group.

"Their offers is depends solely on the Stock Conversion's he not be a peaceful so mean asking a Tory land from one property give it to another."

Council represents Stock Conversion on company's request. A the development is no least a fortnight.